THE LIFE OF SAINT JOSEPH WHITE MUSSER

S. Joseph W. Musser was born on the southeast corner of Motor Avenue, Salt Lake City, Utah, on Second East between South Temple and First South Streets, on March 8, 1872. His father was Amos Milton Musser, of Swiss-Dutch extraction, and had come from Donegal Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, May 20, 1830. His mother, Mary Elizabeth White, was born in Garden Grove, Iowa, November 7, 1846, at the time her parents were fleeing from Nauvoo, Illinois.

His mother's folks had settled at Beaver, where his father met his mother on his trips throughout the Territory as Traveling Bishop for the Church. They were married on October 1, 1864. S. Joseph W. Musser had six brothers and three sisters. His mother died of an accident in the home at the age of 85 years. She had been his father's first plural wife, and was faithful to the end. She not only raised her own family of ten children, but also the children of two other wives who had "passed on".

From S. J. W. Musser's journal we find his father to have been a very polished gentleman, self-educated, courageous, stable, self-reliant but humble, and a pillar and fighter in the Church. He was severely kind and severely stern. "Love thy neighbor as thyself" was always uppermost in his mind, life and actions. His father had a family of forty souls, four wives and 35 children. His expenses were enormous, shoes alone cost between $50 and $60 per month, repairing and all. That was when good shoes cost $3 a pair. His son, S. J. W. Musser's life was interwoven with that of his father. He seemed born to carry on the fine traditions and well established fundamental teachings of the Church, of which he and his father formed such an important part. His father's missions for the Church had caused him to circumnavigate the globe. His son learned much regarding business, management, clerking, etc. from his father's many business responsibilities, both in and out of the Church. His father had introduced the telephone, phonograph and other benefits to this Territory. He had labored in the Church Historian's Office, as Clerk to the Tithing Office, as Traveling Bishop for the Church, and filled a mission to the Eastern States. His father was author of "Fruits of Mormonism" by Non-Mormon Witnesses, also other valuable missionary pamphlets and works. His father served a six month period in the State Penitentiary, but then, he had showed such courage even as a boy guard in Nauvoo.

We see, from the foregoing that Joseph Musser was born and grew to manhood at a time when the Church was at war with the Government of the U. S., when plural marriage had been declared a crime and the most respected were hunted down and cast into prisons. In Joseph's own words we read;

"I had been nurtured in the Patriarchal Law. I beleive it earnestly. It seemed to me I had met Father Abraham and been taught at his knees. He had many wives and concubines. * Early in life I became familiar with the Lord's revelation to His prophet, Joseph Smith, on the subject of marriage. * At the tender age of seven I found myself defending my father in his plural life. * The fact that my father and mother, noble and grand creatures, were living it was sufficient justification for my endorsement.

"Coming from such an ancestry and being raised in a polygamous atmosphere, by parents devoted to their religious conceptions, I naturally inherited and imbibed a strong spiritual nature. From early youth I devoted my time to the Church. I beleived intensely in the mission of Joseph Smith, and were it possible to become fanatical in accepting the decrees of the Almighty, I have been fanatically religious, but not obdurate toward the religion and actions of others, nor offensively dogmatic.

"I was brought up in a most puritanical fashion with reference to morality. To lose one's virtue was an offence in the eyes of God next to murder -- the shedding of innocent blood. * I beleived this doctrine and I lived it completely -- and I still beleive it. And now, when I simply state that I am now and always have been a natural born polygamist I want my children to know it was not a call of sexual urge that made me so; rather the urge of higher impulses calling me to admit the rights of women, and do my part in seeing that every woman who wished to, enjoyed the rights of motherhood. The urge was offspring, not sexual gratification."

Joseph W. Musser's life dates back to another period of time. He had met or personally knew every President of the Church except the Prophet Joseph Smith. Thus his life and experiences date backward to another generation of thinking, great faith, rich knowledge and the experience to the people of our time, bridging the gap between two periods in Church history. It was because of early Church history and his early experiences that he proved so valuable and helpful especially to younger Saints and the reason he could have such great bearing and influence on lives of Saints today.

In those dark days when his father had to hide often from his enemies, Joseph did his part in helping by taking one plural wife, then another, from one place to another to evade federal officers. He seemed to ever be hiding some plural wife, or a brother in the Gospel from enemies of the Gospel. Even at the early age of eight years he would harness the horses himself and drive the buggy in this worthy work.

He could retell the funeral experiences he felt, what he saw etc. at President Brigham Young's funeral until you'd think you too had been there! Once his father invited him to attend a meeting of the "Grand Council of The Kingdom of God". How vividly he painted the picture of the armed guards admitting the invited guests, and his thrill of knowing his beloved father was one of the members of this Council. It was at this "Grand Council" that he was introduced to President John Taylor and heard him speak. On April 6, 1892 he stood with his grandmother and other Saints to witness the laying of the capstone on the Salt Lake Temple. Apostle Lorenzo Snow led the congregation in the "Hosanna Shout". He remembered April 13, 1892 of going up the east middle tower of the Temple and touching the feet of the golden Angel Moroni.

He says that at one time on May 19, 1900 Samuel H. V. Smith was at the President's Office while he was having George Q. Cannon sign some company bonds. Samuel H. V. Smith stated his Uncle, the Prophet Joseph Smith, stood 6 feet 2 inches in height and Don Carlos Smith, his brother, was 6 feet 4 inches. He said the Prophet had walked under a stick held at his height, then stepped back and jumped over it at that height. President Cannon verified this last statement but thought authorities differed as to the Prophet's height. President Snow, however, gave it as his opinion that the Prophet was 6 feet 2 inches.

The adversary, knowing Joseph W. Musser had a great mission to perform, made many attempts to destroy his life. As an infant he was rescued from a rain-water cistern. Once he fell down a well at the age of three, catching just so his head was above the water. His mother being impressed of his danger, came and rescued him, though he'd been too frightened to cry out. At another time he slid off a roof to the pavement, stepped on the wrong end of a board on a two-story building and plunged down across the rafters of the basement floor. At another time he was mysteriously sucked under water and would have drowned had not his two sons, Milton and Samuel been quick in giving help. Many have been the experiences all through his life off and on, when the adversary endeavored to destroy him and at which time he saw the Lord's power in his receiving help.

His most helpful schooling was the "University of Hard Knocks." For a short time he had been able to attend the L. D. S. University. He herded cattle at the age of ten years, during summer months, their range then being on the East Bench and Emigration Canyon. When fourteen he worked at carpentering on his father's two and a half story house. Later he made utensils for homes, then became a plumber's helper, a butcher, and after that he went into the Real Estate business. His partner in real estate eloped with the proceeds (they had been financed by A. Milton Musser), so Joseph joined his brother Don Carlos in the Drug Store at Franklin, Idaho for $10 per month and lodging in the back shop. They also ran a soda fountain, compounded medicines, etc. When his brother was called on a mission, Joseph worked in the Recorder's Office at Logan, Cache County, Utah. One year spent there recording, making abstracts, straightening out land titles and he returned to Salt Lake and accepted work in the Office of Cannon and Fergusen, Attorneys, as a stenographer. He had learned typing and shorthand from a book, but had much difficulty at first with spelling. Learning from a pocket memorandum book, words and their meanings, until his dream of being a Court Clerk was fulfilled. He studied Blackstone and other works so as to prepare legal papers, complaints, and he tried many legal cases in the lower courts - Justices of the Peace and U. S. Commissioners. (Not having been admitted to the bar he could not practice in higher courts.) His experience made it possible to draw up his own legal papers, deeds and contracts in various enterprises he later was connected with.

His first marriage was to Rose Selms Borquist, June 29, 1892 at the Logan Temple. He left April 3, 1895 for his mission to the Southern States. While on his mission his first child Joseph was born, but became near death. In answer to prayer God comforted his worried father and healed the child. At home his wife earnestly prayed for $5 with which to buy shoes. The next day a dear friend, John M. Cannon, put a $5 bill into her hand.

In 1899 Joseph received a written invitation from President Lorenzo Snow to receive his "Higher Annointings" in the Temple. His wife, himself and four other couples went, and in November 1899 the most glorious blessings known to man were sealed upon them. Those few hours of heaven, so to speak, amid holy surroundings and that glorious calmness and the nearness of the Lord, was something one could not really describe. Joseph wondered why, at only 27 years of age, he could be thus favored, and sealed with "The Holy Spirit of Promise". Then, immediately following this remarkable incident, word of a shocking nature arrived from President Lorenzo Snow to him stating he had been selected to enter plural marriage and to HELP KEEP THE PRINCIPLE ALIVE. He sought guidance with his wife, for word had gone out after the Manifesto, that a definite stop had been put to this practice. He knew those entering it now would be "handled". He could not argue with others and divulge his authority. He knew he was honor bound to carry his own burdens and yet live every law of the Gospel.

In answer to prayer, Mary Caroline Hill came into his family. Her father had been assured by John H. Smith and M. F. Cowley that it was alright and that he should consent to the marriage. Later, under direction of Joseph F. Smith, he had his third wife, Ellis Shipp sealed to him, and in the 1930's he had Lucy Kmetzsch sealed to him, also others. His first four wives have born him 21 children.

Some of his children, as well as lay members of the Church could not understand Joseph's position and the "Special Work" President Snow had performed after the Manifesto; nor the "Special Work" President Joseph F. Smith carried on until his death. When Mary Hill entered that principle people of her Ward placed the scarlet

letter on her breast and her first baby was born in hiding. Later she had to leave the community to protect her husband and save her own life. Joseph was often spoken of as a rebel. Since President Snow, President Smith, and others were active in this "Conspiracy" in high places to carry on this God given work it should not even be suggested by thinking persons that they were in any way dishonorable and doing otherwise than what had been commanded them. They DID, however, conspire together with others, to get people to obey the laws of God when those laws conflicted with the laws of man. They went one step further by confering the sealing powers upon others, Joseph W. Musser among them, to see that this principle did not die out, and to live it also. Because of persecution and pressure, often J. F. Smith would pass him without a word, but later in the shadows would grasp his hand firmly saying, "God bless you Joseph, keep the good work up." Joseph W. Musser was spoken evil of, and had a difficult time in providing for his families. In 1909 the Salt Lake Tribune publicly revealed his marriage relationships. He was at this time a High Councilor of Granite Stake. The news article also tells of plural marriages then made by both his councilors, Frank Y. Taylor and John M. Cannon. The same article calls Granite Stake and Forestdale "Polygamyville" in as much as it was a refuge for the many who lived this law "daring to live their religion" in violation to laws of the land. "He will not be punished for his violation of the law because he has the sanction of the teaching of the Church through D & C and through the life of President Joseph F. Smith, who admits he is living with five wives* recently being fined therefore for the measly sum of $200.00."

After this above information and other private affairs aired by the "News", Brother Joseph as he was fondly known by many, was called in by Francis M. Lyman to meet with the Apostles on the matter. The whole meeting showed Heber J. Grant, Francis M. Lyman opposed to further practice of Plural Marriage under any condition and they threatened him with excommunication "as action had been taken against Brothers Taylor and Cowley." Orson F. Whitney remarked that "the Saints didn't consider Brother John. W. Taylor or Mathias F. Cowley out of harmony, but were simply necessary sacrifices". Some brethren at this meeting protested "that anyone seek God in prayer for the answer to whether it could be lived despite the Manifesto." (For full information of this meeting see Truth Vol. 20, P. 19-23.) Later F. M. Lyman accused Brother Joseph of associating with Henry M. Tanner, A. J. Higgs, and Lewis A. Kelsch, in defying the authorities; that such men as George Teasdale, George Q. Cannon, Abram H. Cannon, Apostles Merril, Woodruff and Taylor had brought reproach upon the Church; that to live this law now violated our pledges with the Government.

After his friend's death, (death of Joseph F. Smith), President Grant was outspoken in his denunciation of all plural marriages after the Manifesto (we presume his own included).

Brother Joseph often had more than one of his family on a mission at a time, for the Church. Once he had three at a time, plus a complaint from the president of one mission that "Elders could no longer travel without purse or script, as it was against present Church policy". Joseph wasn't much interested in policy, but ever interested in commandments of God.

Again in 1929 God spoke and Brother Joseph was ordained a High Priest Apostle and a Patriarch to all the world, by a High Priest Apostle, and he was again commanded not to let a year pass that children were not born under that sacred covenant of Celestial Marriage. He was instructed to give patriarchal blessings to those requesting them and those denied such blessings or without access to a real patriarch

In a blessing given years before to his mother, Mary White Musser, she had been told one of her sons would become an Apostle of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Brother Joseph carried on a great work in informing why, and how this great work was carried out without knowledge of the President of the Church since, Joseph F. Smith, and collecting affidavits of proof of the 8-hour meeting, those commissioned there, etc. Every bit of evidence heretofore and recently collected all bear record of their being thirteen persons present at that meeting; that President John Taylor stood in mid air prophesying great and marvelous things, and counseling his brethren; that five were given SPECIAL CALLINGS and SPECIAL work to do, etc. In most cases some if not all the names of the five were mentioned. George Q. Cannon told Brother Joseph Musser personally that President Taylor had taken steps to see that this law was perpetuated and the work carried on. Joseph copied from President Woodruff's own journal the Revelation of 1889 given on Plural Marriage.

In 1935 Brother Joseph was appointed Editor of Truth Magazine. In 1944 the famous "Boyden Crusade against Plural Marriage" was started. He was arrested and served 7 months in the Utah Penitentiary, and placed on a two year probation period. (For details of arrests and imprisonment see Vol. 20, p. 33 of Truth.)

After being arrested, Brother Joseph was taken to jail where he met a congregation of his brethren, who had also been arrested. The charges were as follows:

1. A Federal charge of conspiracy by placing Truth in the mail; they charged it was obscene, lewd or lascivious.
2. Six brethren were charged with violation of the Mann Act, for transporting their wives over the state line on business trips.
3. Three were charged with the "Lindbergh" kidnapping crime, for conducting a man and his sweetheart over the state lines to be married.
4. Fifteen men were charged with unlawful cohabitation under the state statutes.
5. Some thirty-two men and women were charged, under the state statutes of conspiracy - inducing men and women to break the laws of the state.

Brother Joseph came within the first, fourth and fifth charges.

While in prison, Brother Joseph suffered an attack which might have been the forerunner of his final illness. He had been completely exhausted from years of working among the people; also he'd been the leading figure in the long legal battle, plus discomforts of the State Penitentiary all working together against his health. After his release he was never completely well again. Early in 1949 he suffered a stroke which was followed from time to time by other strokes with increased potency, which finally took his life March 29, 1954 at the age of 82. Upwards of a thousand persons attended his funeral. Years before, he had designed the type of funeral he'd wanted and his wishes were carried out as nearly as possible by his family.

How great were his works in the lives of those who knew him! Who can even estimate the effect his noble life, his God inspired sermons, made on others! Besides sixteen valuable collections of articles and books, he gathered many unpublished manuscripts of lasting worth to those who love the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Besides other offices and ordinations heretofore mentioned he was a Seventy of the 16th Quorum, a local missionary, Asst. Sec. in Y. M. M. I. A., Corresponding Sec. of the State Y. M. M. I. A., Clerk of Special Conference and High Councilor in Duchesne and Wasatch Stakes, and he held many other church offices at various times. He had had his hand and heart in various business endeavors, even political offices. Prejudice of his brethren, mainly President Grant, caused his excommunication and finally his imprisonment. Brother Joseph wept when he heard Saints in

one Ward actually advised to "forget the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants and look to your leaders for counsel and direction." He said, "Such prejudice attempted to Catholisize the flock."

Brother Joseph's missionary labors had taken him from Canada to Mexico. All who really knew him loved him devotedly. He was a gentleman of gentlemen, refined, a very loving and understanding man of God. He was a talented orator and bore a testimony which the honest in heart could not but feel and partake of.

He greived because many of his brethren would not follow his counsel after he came from prison, nor would they accept his leadership, but became a "law unto themselves" going from him, whom the Lord had chosen, to be at their head. Before his death he, through direct revelation, call his successor to the Priesthood head, announced and explained the revelation and presented his successor who was later rejected by vote. The author is witness that when God calls any man, men's rejection of that man does not change the fact that God recognizes him and has called him, and that that man's obligations in that calling remain as great as though the world had accepted him, for God called him. If the world accepted him and God had not called him it would bear little weight with God "for the created cannot dictate to the Creator," so said Joseph W. Musser and other prophets of God.

Note -- Information obtained mostly from S. Joseph W. Musser's Journal and written by O. K. Neilson, December 22, 1964.